



USAID | BULGARIA

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PROJECT PROFILE

Judicial Strengthening Initiative for Bulgaria

USAID promotes activities designed to achieve transparency, competence and efficiency in Bulgaria's judicial system



JSI and the Work of the Courts:

The Judicial Strengthening Initiative mission supports the work of the courts to protect the Bulgarian people and the Constitution through increased efficiency, transparency, and accountability. Themis, seen in the stained glass of the Ministry of Justice, embodies the bedrock democratic principle of fairness uniquely guaranteed by working and efficient courts.

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES Bulgaria's weaknesses in the administration of justice represent the country's most publicized democracy related problem. This situation raises questions about Bulgaria's ability to meet international standards for the promotion of justice and its ability to promote a more stable economy. It also hampers economic development and investment since businesses have little confidence in the Rule of Law. For Bulgaria to advance its economic and democratic reforms, its businesses and households must be able to count on a legal system that responds to their needs and protects their rights.

USAID INVOLVEMENT USAID has placed strengthening the judicial system as the centerpiece of its assistance to Bulgaria. The Judicial Strengthening Initiative (JSI) is USAID's primary tool to strengthen the ability of the court system to deliver services in a more effective, transparent, accountable and predictable way. The initiative builds on previous USAID achievements and intends to leave behind a judiciary that functions with principles of modern court administration and case management, increased transparency, better qualified people, and increased public confidence.

GOAL An independent judiciary that protects the rights of individuals and private institutions, attracts foreign investment, guarantees the efficiency of the market system, enforces the legal and regulatory environment necessary for sustainable economic growth.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION The JSI takes a comprehensive approach to its work involving all parts of the court system both on the local and national level and builds on previous USAID achievements, such as the National Institute of Justice and Model Courts (MCs). Initiatives are closely coordinated with the efforts of other donors and implementers such as the European Union, Open Society Foundation, etc.

- **Improve court administration.** At the regional level, USAID develops court administration best practices through Model Courts and Courts in Partnership with a special focus on reducing case delay and fostering transparency. At the national level USAID works to strengthen the strategic and management capacity of Supreme Judicial Council to operate as a national court administration office, placing it at the center of the efforts to reengineer the judicial system.

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PROJECT FIGURES

Model Courts

Smolian Regional and District Courts (RC and DC), Blagoevgrad RC and DC, Sofia Appellate Court, Sofia District Court, Sofia RC – Family Division, Gabrovo RC and DC, Shumen DC, Plovdiv Appellate Court

Courts in Partnership

Chepelare RC, Gotse Delchev RC, Kurdzhali DC, Kyustendil DC, Montana DC, Sevlievo RC, Shumen RC, Veliko Turnovo DC, Vratsa DC, Sofia RC – Criminal Division

New Courts in Partnership

Varna RC and DC, Dobrich RC and DC, Plovdiv RC and DC, Sliven DC, Bourgas RC, Gorna Oryahovitsa RC, Haskovo RC, Yambol RC

- **National Institute of Justice (NIJ).** Judicial structural reforms will have a limited effect on the delivery of justice if judges and court clerks lack experience and skills to implement them. USAID support of the NIJ builds the competency of members of the judiciary through initial and continuing education of magistrates and court staff on the administration of justice and delivery of court services. Support efforts are aimed at improving the strategic and financial management skills of NIJ Board members, expanding the training curriculum to include new laws, court administration trainings, and legal education, in turn strengthening the programmatic and organizational sustainability of the Institute.
- **Draft and implement key laws and regulations.** The JSI supports public and private sector stakeholder development of key laws and regulations in the areas of procedural and substantive court reform. Meaningful implementation of legislation informs and propels the Rule of Law reform process. USAID works with key stakeholders in the branches of government and through grants to NGO business, academia, associations, and think tanks to draft, advocate and implement laws, regulations and policies pertaining to court reform.
- **Improved public perception of the judiciary.** Because the strength of the judiciary is sustained by public trust, the JSI works to increase public information and confidence in the work of the courts. Enhancements in court administration, the development of justice Institutions such as the SJC and the NIJ, and policy and law formulation are all supported by efforts to increase public awareness and support for the judiciary. The JSI comprehensive public awareness and outreach campaign provides trainings for judicial spokespersons and the press, works with courts on building public trust and confidence, and supports media coverage of the work of partner courts and judicial institutions. The result is a public better informed about the work of the courts and the ongoing development of the judiciary.

PROJECT QUICK FACTS

Title: Judicial Strengthening Initiative for Bulgaria

Implementer: East-West Management Institute, USA

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SUCCESS STORY

The National Institute of Justice:

Formally beginning its activities in November 2003, the NIJ was created by statute via the Judicial System Act (JSA) in 2002. Its mandate calls for providing training to all new judges, prosecutors and investigators and continuing training to all magistrates and court staff. USAID has provided technical support, including management and administrative assistance, training of a cadre of judicial educators, and developing and implementing a comprehensive program of course offerings for judges and judicial staff.

Since the program's inception, all newly appointed judges and those with less than three years of professional experience have attended the program. NIJ delivers appropriate and relevant training by professionally trained Bulgarian faculty using contemporary adult education methodologies and international judicial training best practices. Each year, roughly one thousand officials are trained on topics ranging from criminal and civil law first instance procedures to multinational practices in areas such as judicial ethics. Trainings involve instructors from Bulgaria, the United States, and Europe. The training contributes to a well informed and skilled judiciary that performs its tasks with the utmost effectiveness and efficiency.

The NIJ builds upon the successes and experiences of its predecessor, the Magistrates Training Center (MTC). The MTC, a not-for-profit organization also funded by USAID, performed similar training functions from 1999 until 2003. Becoming a government organization ensures the financial sustainability of judicial training after USAID assistance ends.